

Syriac Hagiography

Texts and Beyond

Edited by

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The Syriac *Martyrdom of the Mimes* and the Performance of Biblical Recitation: Questions of Power and Contexts

Cornelia Horn

1 Introduction

Within the framework of a hagiographical composition, the Syriac *Martyrdom of the Mimes* offers the opportunity to examine two closely intertwined forms of religious expression: the visual presentation of martyrdom and the auditory phenomenon of the recitation of a religious text in a liturgical setting. This article argues that the very composition of martyrdom accounts of actors served as an effective literary tool to express the power of persuasion of biblical recitation, both in writing and through the images associated with the stage.

The *Martyrdom of the Mimes* is an exceptional piece of Syriac literature, holding out the possibility that the work is a translation or adaptation of a Greek *Vorlage*. Our text witnesses to the central role of Syriac language and culture in the development and preservation of martyrdom accounts of actors and entertainers as a distinct hagiographical subgenre.¹ Whereas late antique

1 For a useful recent survey of the development of martyrdom accounts across chronological and religious divisions, see for example Th. Baumeister, "Zur Entstehung der Märtyrerlegende," in *Christian Martyrdom in Late Antiquity (300–450 AD): History and Discourse, Tradition and Religious Identity*, ed. by P. Gemeinhardt and J. Leemans (Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte 116; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2012), 35–48. M.B. Dinkler, "Genre Analysis and Early Christian Martyrdom Narrative: A Proposal," in *Sybils, Scriptures, and Scrolls: John Collins at Seventy*, ed. by J. Baden, H. Najman and E. Tigchelaar (Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplements 175; Leiden: Brill, 2016), 314–336, proposes approaching martyrdom accounts with a concept of genre as a construct that achieves distance and in which cognitive elements interact with one another in a dynamic and fluid way. If one frames the conception of narratives of martyrdoms with Dinkler on the basis of a prototype theory and reads individual features of the narratives as contributing elements of an "idealizing cognitive model" (ICM) of martyrdom, the martyrdom narratives of actors and entertainers can be understood as a distinctive subgenre that sits at the intersection of martyrdom narratives and the world of entertainment. However, depending on the dominant ideological discourse one chooses for understanding the main function of martyrdom, the approach through prototype theory also allows one to recognize martyrdom narratives of actors and entertainers as central repre-

and medieval literature in other languages preserves brief accounts of individual actors or entertainers, both the Syriac *Martyrdom of the Mimes*, and its likely *Vorlage* found in a Syriac Vatican manuscript and entitled, *Martyrdom of a Mime*, emerge as the only surviving somewhat longer and substantial narratives of the martyrdom of one or more actors.²

At the core of the story of any martyr is a radical claim to truth. In Christian hagiography, this conviction is revealed through conflict with secular authorities. The martyr and the ruler are themselves proxies in an apocalyptic war of good and evil. The task of the martyrdom account is to inspire the audience to take sides. One may identify genres of martyrdom accounts by the precise ways in which this struggle of invisible powers becomes perceptible. This mediation of invisibility can occur through images or words. In the *Martyrdom of the Mimes*, the reader is offered both visual as well as aural symbols which encode the identity of the martyr's struggle.³ These sensory cues clothe ideas and faith convictions with a certain level of accessibility and a power of persuasion that attracts through its corporeality, not merely through its intellectuality.⁴ This manifestation of the persuasive authority of passion narratives is not limited to the artistry with which the texts speak to their audience's emotions, senses, and related memories. In particular, the persuasive authority of Christian martyrdom accounts owes much to their biblical performativity, that is, their ability to present their audience's present reality through reading biblical texts as prophecies of contemporary experience. In our subject, the recitation of sacred texts establishes the martyrs as successors of the missionaries of

sentatives of the genre of martyrdom accounts insofar as some might characterize Christian religious identity and the Christian life as being constituted by the perfect imitation of the life of Christ, up to and including death, whether physically or symbolically through the sacraments and the liturgy. For related perspectives, see R.A.D. Young, *In Procession before the World: Martyrdom as Public Liturgy in Early Christianity* (The Père Marquette Lecture in Theology 2001; Milwaukee, Wis.: Marquette University Press, 2001); and C.R. Moss, *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

- 2 The critical edition of both of these texts is in preparation. In 1904, Josef Link published a partial edition with German translation of the Syriac *Martyrdom of the Mimes* as the results of his doctoral dissertation at the University of Bern: J. Link, *Die Geschichte der Schauspieler nach einem syrischen Manuscript der königlichen Bibliothek in Berlin* (Inaugural-Dissertation zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde der hohen philosophischen Fakultät der Universität Bern; Berlin: H. Itzkowski).
- 3 On the aesthetic dimensions of martyrdom in modern art, see also M. Escribano, *Dalí's Religious Models: The Iconography of Martyrdom and its Contemplation* (Ph.D. dissertation; University of Essex), 2016.
- 4 On the role of the body in art that performs violence and torture, see for example D. Terciò, "Martyrdom as Performance," *Performance Research* 15.1 (2010): 90–99.

primitive Christianity. The staged liturgy one encounters in the texts, in which the reading and explanation of sacred texts play an important role, begins the conversion of the actors, continued in their imitation of baptism, and coming to completion in their martyrdom. Indeed, it is with regard to performance aspects in public settings that the reading aloud of biblical texts in the framework of a proclamation and the witness of a martyr intersect with special force. At the point of overlap between the recitation of biblical texts and the celebration and commemoration of the witness of a martyr, the audience encounters anew the power and authority of recitation as public performance.⁵ In that, the rhetorician's, and here even more the thespian's stage allows one to grasp the relationship between the forces that are guiding and active in the proclamation of sacred words on the one hand and the visual and audible persuasive power of the performance of self-sacrifice in the martyr's witness on the other.

2 Manuscript Evidence, Dating, and Genre

The sole witness to the *Martyrdom of the Mimes* is Syriac MS Sachau 222 (catalog entry 75),⁶ 464^r–518^r.⁷ This manuscript is a copy which the Chaldean Catholic deacon 'Isā bar Isaiah from Alqōš, Iraq, wrote out; its *Vorlage* is lost. The colophon states that the copyist completed his work on August 10, AD 1881.⁸ Carl Eduard Sachau (1845–1930) acquired the manuscript during his tenure as the director of the Institute of Oriental Languages at the Friedrich-Wilhelms-University of Berlin, beginning in 1887.⁹

5 In the case of the *Martyrdom of the Mimes*, the overlap between performance and liturgy occurs potentially on multiple levels, given that the text features liturgical elements but also may have been used itself, perhaps only in part, in liturgical settings.

6 E. Sachau, *Verzeichniss der syrischen Handschriften der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin*. 2 vols. (Die Handschriften-Verzeichnisse der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin 23.1–2; Berlin: A. Ascher & Co., 1899), 1:289–291.

7 Digitized images of the manuscript pages containing the Syriac *Martyrdom of the Mimes* are available at <http://resolver.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/SBB0000749500000000> [accessed January 12, 2018].

8 For the text of the concluding colophons at the very end of the manuscript, see fol. 570^v. See <http://resolver.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/SBB0000749500001152> [accessed January 12, 2018].

9 The documentation of Eduard Sachau's collection of Syriac manuscripts is available in Sachau, *Verzeichniss der syrischen Handschriften*. For information concerning the collection of Syriac manuscripts that were in the possession of the State Library of the Prussian Cultural Heritage prior to Sachau's acquisitions, see E. Sachau, *Kurzes Verzeichniss der Sachau'schen Sammlung syrischer Handschriften nebst Übersicht des alten Bestandes* (Berlin: Schade, 1885).

This manuscript is a copy of a hagiographic collection with two titles. The first, found towards the beginning of the manuscript, calls the collection a “Book of the Stories of the Saints, Apostles, and Martyrs” (fol. 2^v). Included are apocryphal works pertaining to apostles, figures connected with apostles, and apostle-like characters, namely: the *Acts of Thomas* (fols. 2^v–52^r), of Mār Mari (fols. 52^r–74^r), of Andrew and Matthias (104^r–112^v), the *Martyrdom of Stephen* (118^r–123^r), and the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* (559^v–570^r). One suspects that these apostles and apostolic figures were selected for inclusion because according to tradition, they were martyred or could count, at least, as confessors, who had experienced tortures and trials for their faith. That the focus on martyrdom accounts was prominently on the mind of the ancient producers, later copyists, and users of this manuscript is suggested by the second title of the collection, found in the first of the manuscript’s four colophons on the last page: “Book of the Stories of Martyrs” (fol. 570^v). This manuscript has been collated in editions of several of the texts to which it witnesses.

While the *Martyrdom of the Mimes* is the only witness to one type of a subgenre of hagiography of performers and entertainers, namely, one in which a small number of actors convert the rest of their troupe, as well as prostitutes and other kinds of performers, who then convert an entire city and through divine intervention topple their tyrant, it is possible to identify two other types of this subgenre of actor martyrdom accounts. First, one finds shorter notices of mimes, dancers, or other entertainers tortured to death. For the most part, such notices are preserved in synaxaria, those collections of accounts of saints’ lives that are arranged according to the liturgical order of the year which are read typically as part of the daily office of prayer. Identifications of such narratives have been possible thus far in synaxaria that were written in or translated into Greek, Armenian, and Latin.¹⁰ Second, there are extant shorter martyrdom accounts, comprising texts of only a few pages, which tell of the martyrdom of an individual actor or entertainer; a small number of these are preserved in Greek and Syriac.¹¹

10 For instance, the martyrdom of Gelasios is found in the *Acta Sanctorum* (AASS) February 5, 680, for February 27. An overview with identifications of occurrences of some such narratives in synaxaria is available in A.W. White, *Performing Orthodox Ritual in Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 74–77. See also the 68-volume presentation of acts of the Christian saints, collected by Jean Bolland and others, *Acta sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur vel a catholicis scriptoribus celebrantur* (reprinted Brussels, 2nd edition, 1965).

11 See for example the edition of the *passio* of Porphyrios in Ch. van de Vorst, “Une passion inédite de S. Porphyre le mime,” *AB* 29 (1910): 258–267.

One example from this last category is the martyrdom account of a single actor, mentioned above, entitled *Martyrdom of a Mime* and attested in Vatican MS Syriac 161. This story bears similarities to the expansive *Martyrdom of the Mimes*.¹² The dating of Vat. sir. 161 is difficult. Only the final martyrdom account contained in the manuscript, the story of Iṣō'sabran, can be assigned to a particular author, Catholicos of the Church of the East Iṣō'yāb III (in office 650 to ca. 657/658). Stephen and Joseph Assemani characterized the relevant manuscript as "very old" (*pervetustus*).¹³ Sebastian Brock has dated Vat. sir. 161 to the ninth century on the basis of paleographical criteria.¹⁴ With the usual caveats, one may conclude that the *Martyrdom of a Mime* may have been a part of a collection assembled in the second half of the seventh century. If so, it may antedate this collection. The lack of other relevant accounts of mimes hinders tracing the development of this subgenre. Further support for the plausibly late antique familiarity of Syriac-speaking audiences with this subgenre of martyrdom literature comes in the form of fifth-century manuscript evidence. The earliest manuscript that is available for the Syriac recension of the *Martyrdom of Philemon and Apollonius*, a martyrdom account that has its origins in Greek and features Philemon, a flute player, is BL Add. 17204, which William Wright dated on paleographical grounds to the fifth century.¹⁵ Traditions about the martyrdom of stage actors and entertainers then are at home in the Syriac-speaking milieu as far back as late antique times and clearly from the fifth century onward.

12 A fuller discussion of this relationship between these two Syriac witnesses for the martyrdom of a group of actors or mimes is in preparation by the author.

13 S.E. Assemani and J.S. Assemani, *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae codicum manuscriptorum catalogus. Partis primae, tomus tertius, complectens reliquos codices chaldaicos sive syriacos* (Roma: Ex typographia linguarum orientalium, 1759), 324: "Codex in 4. membraneus pervetustus, foliis 216. constans, inter Syriacos Codices a nobis e Scetensi Monasterio in Bibliothecam Vaticanam inlatus, olim Secundus."

14 S.P. Brock, "The Earliest Syriac Manuscript of the Martyrdom of Philemon and Companions," in *Ægyptvs Christiana: Mélanges d'Hagiographie Égyptienne et Orientale dédiés à la Mémoire du P. Paul Devos, Bollandiste*, ed. by U. Zanetti and E. Lucchesi (Cahiers d'Orientalisme 25; Genève: Patrick Cramer, 2004), 29–42, here 31. A. McCollum, "The Martyrdom of Theonilla in Syriac," *AB* 128 (2010): 312–328, does not comment on the manuscript's dating. Sachau, *Kurzes Verzeichniss*, ix, briefly comments on Sachau MS Syriac 222, without discussion of the manuscript's age. Yet there is no doubt that the manuscript evidence of the *Martyrdom of a Mime* predates that of the *Martyrdom of the Mimes* in the Syriac tradition.

15 See W. Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum, Acquired since the Year 1838*. 3 vols. (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1870–1872), 3:1081. Brock, "Earliest Syriac Manuscript," 31, follows Wright's dating.

3 Mimes and Liturgical Performance

A mime was a late antique stage actor,¹⁶ who has little in common with the modern pantomime.¹⁷ While one thinks of pantomime artists communicating through gesture without words, mimes of late antiquity were actors, artists of the full range of theatrical expression, including spoken performance. Although mime performance recreated on the stage commonplace characters found in the home and in the marketplace, above all, mimes were comedic actors, who lampooned these characters and thereby offered an entertaining critique of society, its prejudices and conceits. Mime performance clearly aimed at producing comic effects and catered to an audience that expected comedy and sought to be entertained, often through physical humor, appealing to base urges and instincts.

Being a detailed account, our martyrdom offers a view onto the perception of mimes by wider society and reveals common assumptions about their behavior on and off stage. In essence, the story is a hagiographical tale, with roots in the Greek milieu.¹⁸

Indeed, Byzantine manuscripts preserve a number of Greek martyrdom accounts of a single mime, but there is no story that comes even close to our tale, with the exception of the narrative presented in the Syriac *Martyrdom of a Mime* referenced above. In our account the actors performing a farce of the Christian sacraments of initiation and communion are irrevocably converted

16 On the performance of mime in the ancient world, see for instance H. Reich, *Der Mimus: Ein Litterar-Entwicklungsgeschichtlicher Versuch. Erster Band, Erster Teil: Theorie des Mimus* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1903); H. Wiemken, *Der griechische Mimus: Dokumente zur Geschichte des antiken Volkstheaters* (Bremen: Schünemann Universitätsverlag, 1972); R.E. Fantham, "Mime: The Missing Link in Roman Literary History," *Classical World* 82:3 (1989): 153–163; and R. Hunter, "'Acting Down': The Ideology of Hellenistic Performance," in *Greek and Roman Actors: Aspects of an Ancient Profession*, ed. by P. Easterling and E. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 189–206.

17 The differences between pantomime and mime emerge very clearly in R. Webb, *Demons and Dancers: Performance in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008). See also E. Wüst, "Mimus," *Realenzyklopädie der Altertumswissenschaften* 15 (1932): 1727–1764; E. Wüst, "Pantomimus," *Realenzyklopädie der Altertumswissenschaften* 18 (1949): 833–869; E. Csapo and W.J. Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 369–389; M.-H. Garelli, *Danser le mythe: la pantomime et sa réception dans la culture antique* (Louvain: Peeters, 2007); and E. Hall and R. Wyles, eds., *New Directions in Ancient Pantomime* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

18 C. Horn, "The Martyrdom of the Mimes, Syriac MS 75 (Sachau 222): Content and Context," *The Harp* 18 (2005): 55–69.

into Christians who will bear witness to their faith before a king, who is identified as a Goth and the ruler of the city of Oxyrhynchus and who is shown to be bent on preventing at least some of the citizens from converting to Christianity. Yet the city clearly was not without a Christian presence, neither historically nor from the literary perspective of the martyrdom account of the mimes.¹⁹ If one takes the reference to Oxyrhynchus at face value, one may bring to the table the varied evidence, including papyri and historical narratives, which shows that at the latest from the second half of the third century on, this Egyptian town was home to an organized Christian presence, comprising even a church hierarchy that included a bishop and an amazingly great number of ascetics and monks.²⁰ Also the Oxyrhynchus of our narrative has a bishop, who plays an important role at the start of the story. The presence of a Christian bishop in a city that is, in the early parts of the narrative, presented as if it were without Christians is likely a literary anachronism created to serve specific narrative goals: the bishop's role is to complete the sacraments of initiation for the mimes who have been baptized, and to assist in baptizing the remaining mimes.

Thrown into prison, the mimes turn their cell into a heavenly cathedral. Since they are deprived of food and water, an angel comes to give them heavenly fruits to prepare them for their gruesome path to perfection. Along the way, they convert all whom the evil king sends to pull them from their faith, whether through persuasion, torture, or seduction. The senators, soldiers, prostitutes, musicians, and bathhouse attendants all become captivated through the miraculous healings of the mimes effected in the name of Jesus. One by one, the king dispatches his Christian attendants to their Lord with beheadings and torture.

19 L.H. Blumell and Th.A. Wayment, eds., *Christian Oxyrhynchus: Texts, Documents, and Sources* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2015), 7, evaluate and summarize the state of scholarship and conclude that claims to first-century evidence for a Christian presence at Oxyrhynchus are “sensational,” “not persuasive,” and “smack [...] of special pleading” and that the finds of fragments of canonical and non-canonical gospels can be dated paleographically to the second century. They agree with the perspective that from the middle of the third century onwards, the presence of Christians is supported by documentary papyri. On the latter, see also earlier on the summary in A.M. Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord: Early Christians and the Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (Harvard Theological Studies 60; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 19.

20 See *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* (ed. A.-J. Festugière, *Historia monachorum in Aegypto: édition critique du texte grec* [Subsidia hagiographica 34; Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1961], 41–43); and the Oxyrhynchus Papyri, discussed for instance in Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord*, 81–151, who suggests (100) to recognize in the “beloved papa Sotas” (P.Oxy. 36.2785, lines 1–2) the first known Christian bishop of Oxyrhynchus.

Of special interest in this story is the role of prostitutes, who are a counterpart to the mimes.²¹ Sent to entice the mimes to break the monotony of their prison stay with a wild orgy, the women experience a fearsome miracle of fire. Rejecting their previous profession and observing strict chastity, these women are miraculously saved from the king's attempts to defile them with a mass rape at the hands of young soldiers. Each time, the women are saved through a miraculous intervention involving smoke and sand that blind their assailants. The first group of forty soldiers is convinced of the truth of their religion and agree to join the women in witnessing unto death. In what must be the only scene of mass transvestitism among saints in any Christian hagiography, the fourteen women and an equal number of soldiers appear before the king in each other's clothing.²² The king, shocked and embarrassed, orders the deaths

21 C. Horn, "Women, Prostitution, and Violence in the Syriac *Martyrdom of the Mimes*," in *Syrien im 1.–7. Jahrhundert nach Christus: Akten der 1. Tübinger Tagung zum Christlichen Orient (15.–16. Juni 2007)*, ed. by D. Bumazhnov and H.R. Seeliger (Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 62; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 111–143.

22 For discussion of the phenomenon of transvestitism that involves women changing into men in their outer appearance in early Christian texts, S.J. Davis, "Crossed Texts, Crossed Sex: Intertextuality and Gender in Early Christian Legends of Holy Women Disguised as Men," *J ECS* 10.1 (2002): 1–36, is helpful. M. Doerfler, "Coming apart at the Seams: Cross-dressing, Masculinity, and the Social Body in Late Antiquity," in *Dressing Judeans and Christians in Antiquity*, ed. by A. Batten, C. Daniel-Hughes and K. Upson-Saia (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2014), 37–51, studies male cross-dressing as discussed by Ambrose of Milan. In this account, one is reminded of the *saliae virgines*, the Salian Virgins, who may have been men dressed as women as part of an initiation ritual, as recounted in Sextus Pompeius Festus; see H.S. Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion: Transition and Reversal in Myth and Ritual* (Studies in Greek and Roman Religion 6.2; 2nd ed; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 158. Of interest is that Festus calls these virgins 'hired.' Would this imply that the Salian brothers were playing the role of virgins who were purchased to become prostitutes? The complementary side of transvestitism that involves male figures dressing in female garb or otherwise availing themselves of forms of expression more customarily identified with women has been examined as well. For a recent discussion of the polemical purchase of discussing this phenomenon in ancient Christian settings, see for instance A. Eppinger, "Hercules cinaedus? The Effeminate Hero in Christian Polemic," in *TransAntiquity: Cross-Dressing and Transgender Dynamics in the Ancient World*, ed. by D. Campanile, F. Carlà-Uhink and M. Facella (Routledge Monographs in Classical Studies; London: Routledge, 2017), 202–214. Significant aspects of the relevance of transvestitism specifically in the Syriac *Martyrdom of the Mimes* have been explored most recently in A.-E. Hampel, "Gender-Crossing im 'Martyrium der Mimen': Eine Kleider-tauschszene im Kontext von Geschlechtertransformation und Geschlechtertranszendenz in der Vorstellungswelt des frühen Christentums," Hausarbeit im Seminar "(Virtuelle) Unterhaltungskulturen im Gespräch: Das Theater, Syrische Hagiographie und das Internet," Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, Halle an der Saale, Wintersemester 2016/17 (unpublished).

of the men. Thus begins the long series of confrontations between the mimes and the former prostitutes that culminates in a final duel of wits capped by a spectacular scene of apocalyptic imagery.²³

All this excitement and entertainment is made possible in the story through the self-activating power of the Christian sacraments, initiated and made real through the recitation of formulations taken from or reminding one of the Holy Scriptures and the Christian tradition. It is worthwhile then to explore more closely how this martyrdom text witnesses to the performative power of Biblical recitation. Here one notes that the contextual setting of this Biblical recitation is thoroughly liturgical. The *Martyrdom of the Mimes* features scenes that contain liturgical elements in several places, for instance, a mass baptism in the public bath. However, these liturgical components occur most densely in the first quarter of the text, which narrates the process of conversion of the core of the group of the mimes.

A first liturgical scene (fols. 465^{r-v}) takes place on stage. The text proposes to present “the greatness of the practical deeds of the clergy, the ritual of the church, and the perfection of martyrdom” (fol. 465^r, end of page). Thus, it describes how the actors established a church building on stage, affixed to it a cross, erected an altar and a baptismal font. Concluding their preparations, they appointed from among themselves a group of members of the clergy, comprised of deacons, a priest, acolytes, and a bishop as their leader. They chose the mime Glykos to play the role of the bishop, leading the community. He seated himself on the throne which they had set up at an elevated position on stage. We learn that these mimes appointed to liturgical offices were selected because of the beauty of each one’s face (ܚܝܬܐ ܡܡܬܐ, *b-hezweh šappirā*; fol. 465^v). Then as now, the beauty of the actors was part of the draw for the audience, helping to guarantee the success of a play on stage. Against the background of other ancient audiences’ judgments concerning the beauty of entertainers, either with regard to the roles they played or in reference to their physical beauty, one might consider that Glykos might have been selected for the leading ecclesiastical role in this martyrdom’s set-up, because of the sexual attraction his physical beauty exuded.²⁴ After all, a group of attractive pros-

23 For further details on the function of the prostitutes in this martyrdom account, see Horn, “Women, Prostitution, and Violence.”

24 D. Braund and E. Hall, “Gender, Role and Performer in Athenian Theatre Iconography: A Masked Tragic Chorus with KALOS and KALE Captions from Olbia,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 134 (2014): 1–11, discuss several cases of depictions of entertainers that are accompanied by varying inscriptions of the adjective καλός (“beautiful”) and found on roughly fifth-century BCE Athenian vases. The authors emphasize (p. 7) that the adjective

titutes also have a major role to fill in this story. In addition, the reference to Glykos' beauty could also be understood as casting a shadow of transformed or distorted masculinity on the bishop's role he was to play. Older evidence related to the world of the theater supports that the adjective *καλός* at times served to emphasize too effeminate an appearance of a male figure.²⁵ Three further mimes in the *Martyrdom of the Mimes* were appointed to lower ecclesiastical offices: the mime Glaucus received the role of the presbyter, Arcadius that of a chanter, and Pausaltas that of a deacon. Their friends were assigned to constitute those who were to be baptized.

Initiating the first ritual, the members of the audience began by asking the mime who played the bishop to "speak to [them] and instruct [them], what the true faith is and what arguments one was able to offer for it and what the power of the glory of God is" (fol. 465^v). Moreover, the congregation on stage articulated their hope to receive an explanation of the coming of the Messiah, about whom it was said that he was the Son of God. This exhortation was in line with expectations pertinent to the office of the overseer (*ἐπίσκοπος*), or bishop, already in the first two centuries of Christian history. According to 1 Tim 3:2.6, such a Christian overseer had to be able to teach and have longer-term experience with the requirements of the Christian faith, doctrine likely being included, so that he might not be overcome by physical and intellectual temptations.

In response to the audience's request, Glykos presided over a ritual reading of biblical texts. This perhaps unexpected step on the part of the bishop is instructive insofar as he did not start delivering a speech, with which he could have offered instruction on matters of the Christian faith, but instead initiated the celebration of the liturgy. One of the fundamental principles of eastern Christian spirituality, *lex orandi, lex credendi*, or "the rule of how one is to pray is the rule of how one is to believe," is at work here. Through the mime bishop's initiative, the truth of what is to be believed was made accessible to his audience, both to his fellow mimes on stage as well as to the audience within the story, who listened to his words.²⁶ Yet this truth also came to be available, through

expresses the audience's satisfaction with the quality of the performance and of the role played, not with individual characteristics, physical or otherwise, of the entertainers and performers. Yet they also know of other cases (p. 7), where the adjective does reference physical beauty and often suggests sexual attraction.

25 Braund and Hall, "Gender, Role and Performer," 8–9.

26 In a further extension, of course, this truth also came to be available to any reader of the text or any other audience, including those who may have been present at a performance of the story as a whole.

the medium of the Syriac *Martyrdom of the Mimes*, to anyone who availed herself or himself of the opportunity to read about or listen to this witnessing of how the Christians prayed and more specifically, how they celebrated the liturgy, here on stage at least some parts of it. The mime bishop's decision not to deliver a sermon but recite Scripture, a decision, which moved the action of the play forward, suggests that the text valued the power and influence of liturgical performance and the power of the recitation of Scripture within this performance in particular as more significant and effective than the rhetorical presentation of dogmatic content in the form of well-formed speeches that teachers or leading administrators might offer. At this point then the text offers a very prominent example of a public recitation of Scripture.

Glykos beckoned the mime chanter, Arcadius, to go up onto the bema and sing. The mime Arcadius, intending to make fun of the situation, ascended to the bema that had been set up on stage. This bema, a raised platform which may have protruded from the front of the stage in the theater, formed an integral part of churches in Syria during late antiquity. It was from this platform that biblical texts were recited and from here sermons were delivered. Scholarship has not only examined the surviving evidence for constructions of the bema in Syrian churches, but has also taken note of the geographically rather limited spread of this element of church architecture.²⁷ Despite the fact that our story is set in Egypt, the reference to the bema as an element of church architecture recreated on stage could suggest that the author of the text and the intended audience were Syrian.²⁸ From up on the bema, the mime Arcadius picked up an object that looked and functioned like a book. We learn that this book was "in the style of the praises of David (ܒܫܬܝܠܐ ܕܕܐܘܝܬ ܕܕܐܘܝܬܐ, *b-ṭupsā d-tešbhātā d-dawīd*)" (fol. 465^v).

At first glance, the book could have been, or at least might have appeared to the audience to be, a psalter, the biblical book of Psalms copied out on

27 For relevant scholarship on the bema, see for example G. Tchalenko, *Églises syriennes à bēma*. 3 vols. (Bibliothèque archéologique et historique 105; Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1979–1990); J.-P. Sordini, "Archéologie des églises et organisation spatiale de la liturgie," in *Les liturgies syriaques*, ed. by F. Casingena-Trévedy and I. Jurasz (Études syriaques 3; Paris: Geuthner, 2006), 229–266; E. Loosley, *The Architecture and Liturgy of the Bema in Fourth-to-Sixth-Century Syrian Churches* (TSEC 1; Leiden: Brill, 2012); F. Briquel Chatonnet, "Les églises dans les textes," in *Les églises en monde syriaque*, ed. by F. Briquel Chatonnet (Études syriaques 10; Paris: Geuthner, 2013), 11–40, here 29–30; and W. Khoury and B. Riba, "Les églises de Syrie (IV^e–VII^e siècles): Essai de synthèse," in *Les églises en monde syriaque*, ed. by F. Briquel Chatonnet (Études syriaques 10; Paris: Geuthner, 2013), 41–84, here 70–74.

28 Whether it makes more sense to presume that this element was introduced perhaps by a Syriac translator who may have intended, perhaps, to add an aura of authenticity to the story for a Syriac audience, in Egypt or elsewhere, is debatable.

the presence of a “refrain,” Syriac *ʿōnītā*, which was sung “in the manner of the ritual of the Christian church.” Although the text does not supply any further information about the specific text of the refrain, it states that a recitation of verses from the Psalms was introduced by way of a sung refrain and that this was a customary part of the church’s ritual. One might presume then that the style of recitation followed the basic pattern of a *prokeimenon* in the Byzantine liturgy according to which the reader or psalmist first chanted a single verse of the relevant psalm or song, the choir repeating this verse as a refrain after each verse the chanter read aloud. The conclusion of the *prokeimenon* may consist of the psalmist or reader reciting the first half of the initial verse and the congregation or choir singing or reciting its second half.³¹ While this order of Psalm verses in our text does not in detail reflect any particular liturgical tradition, the reference in the text to “the manner of the ritual of the Christian church” suggests that the reader or audience was familiar with this form of liturgical psalmody.

The text accompanying the five verses from Psalm 119 does not explicitly qualify the style of recitation of these verses as singing all of the material to be presented. Rather, the text, more plainly, introduces Arcadius’ activity as “saying” the words of the verses. This characterization, however, is then spoken of as “singing” when, following the words of the verses from the Psalms, “Arcadius had finished singing (ܙܡܪ, *zammar*) the Psalm text (ܡܙܡܪܢܐ, *mez-mārānā*).” Thus, for the *Martyrdom of the Mimes* the recitation of the Psalms as a text from Scripture that was presented in the course of an imitation of the Christian liturgy was a two-part affair, one that combined a recitation or declamation of words and one that offered a reading of verses from Scripture, or at least paraphrasing Scriptural verses, likely in a style that was recognizable as singing according to a melody. The selection of verses from Psalm 119, which Arcadius is said to have presented here, does not correspond to any of the *prokeimena* that are known from manuscripts that have been studied thus far and that are witnessing to the Middle Byzantine Divine Liturgy.³² The same holds true for the usage of material from Psalm 138, to be discussed below.³³

31 For a more detailed and refined presentation of the recitation of Psalms in the Byzantine liturgy, see for instance the discussion in J. Mateos, “La psalmodie dans le rite byzantin,” *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 15.2–3 (1965): 107–126.

32 Neither Psalm 119 here, nor Psalm 138 further below, appear in the repertoire of Byzantine *prokeimena*, which are studied and edited in G. Hintze, *Das byzantinische Prokeimena-Repertoire: Untersuchungen und kritische Edition* (Hamburger Beiträge zur Musikwissenschaft 9; Hamburg: Karl Dieter Wagner, 1973).

33 Further research concerning the details of Psalm recitation in the liturgy of Syriac-speaking churches may require adjustments to these findings.

Following Arcadius' recitation, the mime Pausaltes, playing the role of the deacon, ascended the bema. Likewise, with the intention of ridiculing the ceremony, he opened up a book and pretended to be reading from "the Apostle," Syriac ܠܠܗܐ *šliḥā*. This refers to the collection of apostolic letters of the New Testament, and may refer to a bound copy of these, bound together for liturgical use. The text Pausaltes read is a pastiche of citations, rather than a continuous pericope: "Christ died for us (Rom 5:8, cf. Rom 5:6, 1 Cor 15:3), and he gave himself up on our account (cf. Eph 5:2, Gal 1:4). If we die for him (cf. Acts 21:13), we shall live in his kingdom (cf. 1 Thess 2:12)" (fol. 466^r, see also fol. 468^v); "Do not defile the spirit of Grace (cf. Heb 10:29) by which you were sealed (2 Cor 1:22, Eph 1:13 and 4:30), and to which you were called, and do not defile your limbs with sin, because you have been redeemed by Christ Jesus (Gal 3:13), and by his blood you have been ransomed (cf. Mt 20:28, Mk 10:45, 1 Tim 2:6, and Heb 9:15)" (fol. 466^r).³⁴ The form of recitation Pausaltes offered was one of reading, and clearly not singing, the text that was in front of him. When reflecting on the amount of text Pausaltes recited, one observes that the passages were rather short. Thus, an actor could simply have recited them from memory and would not necessarily have needed to have them in front of his or her eyes for the performance.

The mention of books and their contents in our text as data concerning contemporary liturgics is obscured by artistic license. The text seems to imply a Psalter and an Apostle, two books, but this is uncertain. We have the liturgical books as they may have existed in that time and place, we have the presentation of actors on stage, who may have used one book as a prop, and we have the account or story (ܠܠܗܐ) of the mimes, itself a work of art, framing the narrative that develops and includes elements of a liturgical celebration. Yet it is still a fact that the research into liturgical books in late antiquity is not all too well developed, as far as Greek sources are concerned, and, with regard to Syriac materials, remains completely neglected. Indeed, it is a difficult area of research, to be sure, given the uncertainty of finding reliable data with which to study the development of the use of such liturgical books.

In a further development on stage, Pausaltes descended from the bema and Arcadius ascended it once more. The text identifies his motivation by stating that Arcadius the chanter intended next to sing the alleluia "in accord with the ritual that precedes the Gospel" (fol. 466^r). Studies of the Christian liturgy and

34 It remains as a task for further study to explore, whether this set of citations reveals any parallels to ancient *testimonia* collections. Quite like the present selection, these functioned in contexts of interreligious tensions, as Flavia Ruani observed.

the usage of the Psalms in Christian worship indicate that the practice of reciting “alleluia” in the context of Psalm verses recited before the reading from the Gospel reflects an ancient practice.³⁵ In the *Martyrdom of the Mimes*, the Psalm read before the Gospel reading is Psalm 138, likely not from a Syriac text, but a Syriac translation from Greek: “I will confess you, O Lord, with all my heart, and before kings will I sing of you, and I will worship in the sanctuary of your holiness and I shall praise your name” (Ps 138:1–2), and immediately following: “Your right hand, O Lord, has hovered over me. O Lord, your mercy is forever, and you do not forsake the work of your hands” (Ps 138:7–8), again, a Syriac rendering of a Greek text or a paraphrase thereof. From this evidence, one could assume that the *Martyrdom of the Mimes* in this instance, where it presents Arcadius as intoning the word “alleluia” and reciting verses from the beginning and end of a Psalm, points towards such a practice of combining the alleluia with material derived from the Psalm. In addition, the fact that Arcadius is said to have recited verses from the beginning and from the end of Psalm 138 could be understood in two different directions: either that he recited only parts of the Psalm in question, or that he recited the whole Psalm, yet the text merely offered a summary reference for this. The evidence of Armenian psalmody practices, for instance, would counsel against the absolute necessity of assuming that the whole Psalm was recited. In the Armenian liturgical usage of the texts of individual Psalms it happens with some frequency that not a whole Psalm, but merely the verses from the beginning and end of a given Psalm are sung or recited.³⁶ However, it is unclear to what extent this reflects a practice contemporaneous to the setting of our text, or how widespread this practice was outside of Armenia.

When the mime Glaucus, who played the role of the priest, replaced Arcadius atop the bema, he acted out the reading of a Gospel passage, but here,

35 For a study of the range and cycle of melodies of the Alleluia that were or are used in the Byzantine liturgy, see for instance Ch. Thodberg, *Der Byzantinische Alleluiarionzyklus: Studien im kurzen Psaltikonstil* (Monumenta Musicae Byzantinae, Subsidia 8; Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1966). See Thodberg, 11, for comments on the immediate placement in the liturgy. See also R. Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West: The Origins of the Divine Office and Its Meaning for Today* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1986), 27, 32, 39–41, and 48; and J.P. Amar, “Syriac Strophic Poetry: Intercalated Psalms,” in *To Train His Soul in Books. Syriac Asceticism in Early Christianity*, ed. by R.D. Young and M.J. Blanchard (CUA Studies in Early Christianity; Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 3–22, here 3–4.

36 See the information provided in the *Čašots‘ girk‘*, the Armenian lectionary, which beyond the references to Scripture passages also writes out, in some instances, the precise texts that are to be read or recited.

as with the reading from the Apostle, we are offered a collage of quotations from and allusions to Matthew, Luke, and John: “Anyone who does not leave father and mother, brothers and sisters, and family and clan to take up his cross and follow me, is not worthy of me, and is not able to be my disciple” (Lk 14:26–27); “Do not acquire anything in the world, and set aside your treasures where thieves [466^v] break in and steal” (Mt 6:19–20); and “Whoever believes in me shall have eternal life, and whoever does not believe in me shall be cast into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth” (cf. Mt 8:12, 13:42, 13:50, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30; Lk 13:28; Jn 5:24, 7:37–38, 12:46).

Given this data, it would be instructive to find a match between any of the passages from the Psalms and from the textual references, citations, or allusions to the New Testament texts that one encounters in this Syriac narrative and any known sets of readings in ancient liturgies as evidenced in lectionaries and patristic writings. Indeed, an exhaustive examination of liturgical manuscripts and studies might lead to improved results. However, in the context of the present study, only a more limited inquiry was possible. The comparison of the Scripture passages that could be identified as having been quoted or alluded to in the *Martyrdom of the Mimes* with the evidence of early Syriac lectionaries, which Francis C. Burkitt examined, reveals that neither Psalm 119 nor Psalm 138 appears in these lectionaries that date to the fifth through seventh century. On the other hand, the references to passages from the Pauline Letters and from the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John can be lined up with readings that were featured at quite a range of different liturgical feasts: one notes more specifically that Scripture readings that are relevant here were presented to the faithful during the mid-Lenten period (Mk 10:32 ff. [first week in mid-Lent], Jn 7:1–30 [Wednesday of mid-Lent], Mt 24:3–51 [Thursday of mid-Lent], Mt 25:1–46 [Friday of mid-Lent], Jn 5:1–29 [Saturday or Sunday of mid-Lent]), during Holy Week (Jn 12:34–50 [Tuesday of Holy Week]), on Good Friday (Heb 9:11–28), at the ablution of Holy Saturday (Heb 10:19–39), on the Eve of Easter (1 Cor 15:1–26; Eph 1:1–2:22), during the Week of Rest / Bright Week (Rom 5:6 and Gal 1:11–2:21 [Tuesday of Week of Rest]; 1 Cor 15:1 ff. and 1 Tim 1:1–2:15 [Friday of Week of Rest]; Rom 5:6–6:23 [Sunday of Week of Rest, morning]), and at the Feast of the Ascension (Eph 4:1 and 1 Tim 1:18–3:16), at the second commemoration of bishops (1 Cor 15:1–28), at the commemoration of priests (Mt 25:14 ff.; Mk 10:13), at the commemoration of the Blessed (Mt 25:14 ff.), at the commemoration of the departed (Jn 5:19 ff.; 1 Cor 15:1–58), at the ordination of priests (1 Tim 1:18–4:16), at the dedication of a church (Heb 9:1–28), at the dedication of a Bar Qyama (Lk 14:25–15:10), at a baptism (Jn 5:1 ff.; Eph 4:1), and at a day of Rogations (Lk 13:1 ff.).

From such a varied list, it is not readily possible to determine a precise *Sitz im Leben* for the readings presented on the stage in the *Martyrdom of the Mimes*. The relative concentration of the relevant lectionary passages during Lent and around Easter on the one hand, and on feasts dedicated to the commemoration or dedication of different members of the clergy or of persons of special rank like the *bnay wa-bnat qyāmā*, as well as on the dedication of a church and the celebration of baptism on the other hand, fits rather well with the overarching purpose of the scenes depicted on stage in the *Martyrdom of the Mimes*, namely to present key figures and key moments of consecration in the life of the one who becomes a member of the Christian church and in the life of the Christian church as a whole. The scope of the Scripture readings then that one encounters in the *Martyrdom of the Mimes* corresponds well with the presentation of the central elements of the life of the church, centering on the feast of the death of Christ, the individual person's preparation for it during a time of fasting and prayer, and the readiness to commit to a special life of dedication as a Christian, either more generally as a baptized Christian, or as one dedicated to the service of God and the church in a particular rank or office. The recitation of Scripture in the *Martyrdom of the Mimes* therefore skillfully manages to focus and center what one may regard as the essence of the Christian message and faith and practice. It is telling that the scene of baptism with water and of anointing with oil follows consequently upon the readings which the church's liturgy employs for the time of preparation for Easter during Lent and Easter itself.

Following this recitation of Scripture passages and of several of their variants, Glaucus descended from the bema and the mime Glykos, in the role of the bishop, approached. It is not clear whether Glykos likewise ascended the bema or sat down on a lower level in order "to expound and instruct the audience" (fol. 466^v). First, he blessed the audience with the words, "May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ shine upon you forever and ever, Amen," to which the whole city was said to have responded, "Amen." Next, Glykos delivered a sermon, in which he expounded in detail the essentials of the Christian faith, employing a summary that contained many of the important elements of the Christian creed. As if merely jokingly, the spectators in the theater gave acclamations to the bishop's speech. Although the audience seemingly did not intend this to occur, the text notes that the hearts of four thousand people from among the crowd in the theater were moved and were, as the *Martyrdom of the Mimes* has it, "in truth filled with faith and with the truth through Glykos' words" (fol. 467^r), so that they requested, seemingly again merely jokingly, to receive baptism on stage. When one of the theater's cisterns had been transformed into a baptismal font, the mime Glaucus took a horn with oil, while the deacon Pausaltes "pro-

claimed the [appropriate baptismal] prayer according to the [baptismal] ritual of the church" (fol. 467^v). Then the mime Glykos, the bishop, had each one approach individually, marked her or him with the sign of the cross, poured oil over her or his head, and baptized him or her in the water of the baptismal font, saying, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit for the healing of your bodies, the forgiveness of your sins, the remission of your debts, and the sanctification of your souls, so that you will become temples of the Holy Spirit, and become worthy of the bridal chamber of the Kingdom of Heaven forever and ever, Amen" (fol. 467^v). Coming up from the waters, the newly baptized received the sign of peace from Glykos, meaning the kiss of greeting on the cheek as common in the Mediterranean, were dressed in white garments, and were told by Glykos that their sign was near, as the Christians used to say. With this, Glykos brought them to the cross. They "kissed it and touched the parts of their bodies and their eyes [that is, their forehead] with it" (fol. 467^v). With this ceremony, the performance of the Christian liturgy of the word and the ritual of baptism had been completed.

4 Conclusion

The Syriac *Martyrdom of the Mimes* is a long and detailed text. The extensive ritual of the liturgy of the word, examined here in combination with the ritual of baptism and to be studied more closely elsewhere,³⁷ is only part of the evidence for the reenactment of liturgical celebrations and other significant Christian rituals which are found in it. However, for a consideration of the text's presentation of the usage of Scripture and Scripture-related passages in acts of

37 The details pertinent to the baptismal ritual are relevant, for instance, for questions pertaining to the dating and provenance of the text and its traditions. The ritual of baptism featured in the *Martyrdom of the Mimes* points to early traditions that underly this part of the text, given that the scene includes only a pre-baptismal anointing. See for instance S.P. Brock, "The Transition to a Post-Baptismal Anointing in the Antiochene Rite," in *The Sacrifice of Praise: Studies on the Themes of Thanksgiving and Redemption in the Central Prayers of the Eucharistic and Baptismal Liturgies in Honour of Arthur Hubert Couratin*, ed. B.D. Spinks (Rome: C.L.V. Edizioni liturgiche, 1981), 214–225; and B. Varghese, *Les onctions baptismales dans la tradition syrienne* (CSCO 512, Subs. 82; Leuven: Peeters, 1989). The motif of the bridal chamber as an evocation of the heavenly kingdom moreover may suggest West Syrian origins. See S.P. Brock, "Some Distinctive Features in Syriac Liturgical Texts," in *Worship Traditions in Armenia and the Neighboring Christian East: An International Symposium in Honor of the 40th Anniversary of St. Nersess Armenian Seminary*, ed. by R.R. Ervine (Avant: Treasures of the Armenian Christian Tradition 3; Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006), 141–160, here 148.

public performance this material is significant. Although it has not been possible to match up the Scripture passages and allusions to Scripture in the text with specific days or liturgical celebrations in a given year, the message, which the recitations of Biblical texts and allusions convey, clearly addresses as main topics God's commandment and witness, Christ's death and the death of the believer with Christ, the reception of the Spirit, of mercy and grace from God, the turning from sin and striving for purity, the worship that is due to be presented to God, and the necessity of the believer to separate herself or himself from the bonds to family and the world, with all its possessions, in order to be able to reach salvation and eternal life. This Biblical recitation leads up to and interprets the celebration of baptism as the core of the liturgy lampooned on stage. Without the experience of the baptismal liturgy and its interpretation through reciting Scripture and its message, there would have been neither martyrdom nor the ensuing conversion of Oxyrhynchus and the fall of its king. Sacramental ritual essentially depends on Biblical recitation to empower those who experience the ritual to have the spiritual strength to act out in their lives how they as new Christians are supposed to live. Moreover, the passages from the Scriptures that are presented in the readings are selected to convey a clear message of worshipping God, receiving strength and support from God, and being ready to separate from the world. With the content and mode of delivery of this message, our text conveys that the liturgical selection is the essential and necessary guide to the interpretation of the Biblical recitation. Without it, the impulse and motivation to action that might arise from one's experience of the sacraments, even if a given sacrament, as in our story, is presented as being performed publicly on stage and merely for purposes of mocking the sacrament, could have missed to produce results that supported the Christian cause. It is the word of the sacred text which gives the performance its power. The words of Scripture performed liturgically, even in mocking, articulate and at the same time effect that actors become Christians willing to accept martyrdom. Thus, the text connects intimately with one another the ritual of baptism and the Christian witness of the martyr through the instrument of Biblical recitation performed in the liturgy.³⁸ Through the performance of recitation then, the truth of the ritual action and the truth of the life of the performer become actionable.

38 Whether any conclusions pertaining to the dating of the story can be drawn from the close connection between baptism and martyrdom remains to be explored elsewhere in greater detail. That the perspective of baptism as martyrdom is a somewhat later interpretation in early Christian sacramental theology has been argued in G. Jeanes, "Baptism Portrayed as Martyrdom in the Early Church," *Studia Liturgica* 23 (1993): 158–176.

The analysis of excerpts from the *Martyrdom of the Mimes* could show that Syriac literature preserves significant evidence for the existence of a subgenre of martyrdom texts that concentrate on martyrdom accounts of actors, in which the performative use of Scripture in contexts of public recitation mediates between performance and divine presence. Our text is a witness to the shape of important parts of the Christian liturgy in the transition between late antiquity and the Middle Ages, particularly with regard to the pairing of Psalm verses with readings from the New Testament. The particular setting of the *Martyrdom of the Mimes* is that of a text that arises from the world of the theater and public entertainment and that even features this world of entertainment as a topic within its own storyline. That the pleasures of the senses did play a special role in this world is supported even from the text itself, which highlights that some actors were chosen for particular roles because of their physical beauty and attraction. What pleased the senses of the audience was to be given preference, one presumes. One might have expected then that the sung recitation of texts, if any actors with suitable and beautiful voices were to be had, likewise would have added to heightening the audience's pleasure.

Against such an expectation it is noteworthy to observe how little space sung recitation of relevant Scripture verses from the Psalms takes up in those scenes in the text that feature the imitation of liturgical celebrations. One might understand this limited use of singing in the text as an indication of the verisimilitude of the liturgical reenactment. The text offers an authentic witness to the shape of the basic elements of the Christian liturgy of the word. There is far less detail lavished on the performance of baptism. At the same time, the text claims to witness authentically to the form in which Scriptural texts were performed in the liturgy in public or at least quasi-public settings. The material from the *Martyrdom of the Mimes* invites further scrutiny and attention. Clearly, it is of relevance as a witness to the aesthetic dimensions of the Christian liturgy. While the first part of the story provides the scholar an opportunity to observe the performance aspects of biblical recitation, the further development of the story, which ultimately ends with the martyrdom of the actors, provides one with a perspective on the potential impact of the power of such a performance of sacred Scriptures at the intersections of the aural and visual realms.

Finally, the Syriac *Martyrdom of the Mimes*, discussed here more extensively, and the Syriac *Martyrdom of a Mime*, addressed more briefly, witness to ambivalences and conflicts in communities about the appropriate relationship between performances of liturgical actions and the usage of public spaces, including the visual, aural, and oral spheres. The story lines place on display

some of the efforts of public authorities to disabuse Christians of their control over the execution and interpretation of their liturgical rituals and how they enact them in practical ways. Given that the earlier manuscripts that witness to these text traditions date to the ninth century, with a reasonable possibility that the stories contained in the manuscripts might go back even earlier, to the seventh century, the question arises whether the particular cases of the Syriac martyrdom narratives of mimes may in fact address not only or primarily internal Christian tensions, but rather conflicts or points of contention between Christians and early Islamic authorities concerning Christian liturgical spaces and rituals. A fuller investigation of this dimension of the text, however, has to remain a task for a future study.

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Sigla and Abbreviations

AB	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
AMS	P. Bedjan, <i>Acta martyrum et sanctorum</i> . 7 vols. (Paris–Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1890–1897)
ARCBH	S. Efthymiadis, ed., <i>The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography</i> . 2 vols. (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2011, 2014)
BHG	F. Halkin, <i>Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca</i> . 3 vols. (Subsidia hagiographica 8a; 3rd ed.; Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1957); <i>Novum Auctarium</i> —F. Halkin, <i>Novum auctarium bibliothecae hagiographicae graecae</i> (Subsidia hagiographica 65; Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1984)
BHL	<i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina</i> (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1898–1901, 1911, 1986)
BHO	P. Peeters, <i>Bibliotheca hagiographica orientalis</i> (Subsidia hagiographica 10; Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1910)
BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
CHRC	<i>Church History and Religious Culture</i>
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
GEDSH	S.P. Brock, A.M. Butts, G.A. Kiraz, and L. van Rompay, eds., <i>Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage</i> (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2011)
HE	<i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>
JCSSS	<i>Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies</i>
J ECS	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
JS	P. Bedjan, <i>Homiliae selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis</i> . 5 vols. (Paris–Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1905–1910)
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JThS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
NAS	Nikodemos Hagioreites, <i>Συναξαρίστης τῶν δώδεκα μηνῶν τοῦ ἐνιαύτου</i> , 3 vols. (Ἐν Βενετίας: Ἐν τῇ Τυπογραφίᾳ Πάνου Θεοδοσίου του ἐξ Ἰωαννίνων, 1819; repr. Αθήνα: Δόμος, 2005)
OCA	Orientalia Christiana Analecta
OCP	Orientalia Christiana Periodica
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
OLP	Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica
PG	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i>
PO	<i>Patrologia Orientalis</i>
ROC	<i>Revue de l'Orient chrétien</i>

SCp	H. Delehay, <i>Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae e codice Sirmondiano nunc Berolinensi adiectis synaxariis selectis</i> (Propylaeum ad Acta Sanctorum, Novembris; Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1902)
SL	M. Sokoloff, <i>A Syriac Lexicon: A Translation from the Latin, Correction, Expansion, and Update of C. Brockelmann's Lexicon Syriacum</i> (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns / Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2009)
SP	<i>Studia Patristica</i>
Subs.	Subsidia
Syr.	Scriptores Syri
TSEC	Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>